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ABSTRACT

Broadly speaking, all poetry is "found" somewhere, in something which inspires a writer to want to develop his or her thoughts in verse. However, inspiration is sometimes lacking for both experienced poets and new ones, such as students who are required to write poetry for a class. "Found poetry" can serve as an antidote to an experienced poet's block, but it can also get a new poet rolling with the use of someone else's language, images, cadences, and observations about life. "American Life Histories: Manuscripts from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936-1940" provides a wealth of material on which to find "Found Poetry." In this lesson, designed for the 7th to 9th grades, students draw on "American Life Histories" to compose "found poetry." Students will draw on the language (dialect, jargon, descriptive detail, etc.), arrange and rearrange it, add language of their own, and ultimately create new poems which honor the histories, but are indeed the students' own work. This unit is best undertaken after students have studied a good amount of published poetry and are familiar with at least several different elements common to most verse. Selected manuscripts from the Federal Writers' Project are attached. (PM)

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The Learning Page... lesson plans

Enhancing a Poetry Unit with American Memory.

By

Alison Westfall and Laura Mitchell

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CS 511 408

Enhancing a Poetry Unit with American Memory

Alison Westfall and Laura Mitchell

Students explore poetry using American Life Histories: Manuscripts from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936-1940 collection of American Memory, which covers personal stories collected by the Works Progress Administration. In particular, students write "found poetry" based on the stories found in this collection.

This unit is best undertaken after students have studied a good amount of published poetry and are familiar with at least several different elements common to most verse. These can be found in any grade-level student text or teacher manual, from junior high on up. Briefly, elements to look for include the following: alliteration, repetition, sensory language, metaphor and simile, imagery, rhythm, stanzas, and line breaks.

Objectives

- To ground and authenticate elements of a poetry unit through historical primary sources.
- To appreciate and recognize the elements of poetry and then to create "found poetry" from the stories and language recorded in American Life Histories, 1936-1940 from diverse geographic regions.

Time Required

Two to five weeks. Direct involvement with American Memory will require 2-5 class periods, dependent on computer resources, number of students, etc.

Recommended Grade Level

7th - 9th grades

Curriculum Fit

The unit is also suitable to units on drama, biography, autobiography, and fiction.

Resources Used

- American Life Histories: Manuscripts from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936-1940
- Hess, Karen. *Out of the Dust*. New York: Scholastic Press, 1997.
  A novel in free verse about the life experiences of a young girl in the Dust Bowl.
- Reference works for oral history/WPA Narratives:
  - Bloxom, Marguerite D., *Pickaxe and Pencil: References for the Study of the WPA*. Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 1982.
  - *Oral History Interview Guidelines*. Washington, DC: The Museum, 1998.
  - Ritchie, Donald A., *Doing Oral History*. New York: Maxwell Macmillan International, 1995.

Procedure

Broadly speaking, all poetry is "found" somewhere, in something which inspires a writer to want to develop his or her thoughts in verse. However, inspiration is sometimes lacking for both experienced poets and new ones, such as

students who are required to write poetry for a class. "Found Poetry" can serve as an antidote to an experienced poet's block, but it can also get a new poet rolling with the use of someone else's language, images, cadences, and, of course, observations about life. It's quite possible to find the basis of poetry in certain newspaper articles and headlines, and even in drier nonfiction texts.

American Life Histories, 1936-1940 provide a wealth of material on which to found "Found Poetry". Because the Life Histories are in the most basic sense the personal property of the people chronicled in them, poets and teachers of student poets would be well advised to approach them with the respect due any human being, and to use them for the good purposes of understanding history and creating art.

This caution is necessary because many of the Life Histories will seem outrageous to students because they depict colorful, often difficult lives and may be told in the most vernacular terms. Bad grammar, too, and dialects have their place in poetry; teachers may need to work on this with their students.

Drawing on American Life Histories, students compose "found poetry" grounded in the WPA narratives. For an example, see Found Poetry Based on Elsie Wall Students will receive direction in free text and geographical searching and choose stories to turn into poems. They will draw on the language (dialect, jargon, descriptive detail, etc.), arrange and rearrange it, add language of their own, and ultimately create new poems which honor the histories, but are indeed the students' own work.

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1. The first step for the Found Poetry unit is to identify rich texts from the Life Histories to draw on. A text is "rich" if its story or situation is reasonably interesting to a student and is told in a colorful, spirited, or involved way by the subject or the writer.

    - One such story is "Cowboy Life", found by searching terms "ranch and steers", which could be the basis for some vivid short narrative poems.

    - The story of Anna Potter Davis, found in a search for *watermelon* and *summer*, could inspire some descriptive poetry about food and family life.

    - Another history, "The Newton Family", found by searching *dogs* and *chickens*, could be used for either descriptive or narrative poems.

    - Based on the "Blizzard of 1888", found with the key words *snow* and *horses*, students in our classroom wrote several poems. See Found Poetry Examples with Blizzard of 1888 for two of the student poems.

2. The teacher locates one text from American Life Histories and composes a poem as an example. After distributing the poem to the class, the teacher explains found poetry and describes how he/she wrote the poem.

3. The teacher locates a second narrative for the class to work on as a whole. After a class discussion of the passage's images and themes, and after breaking out the evocative language, the teacher models a short poem of 4-6 lines.

4. Next, the students, alone or in pairs, compose poems centered on one aspect of the narrative.

    - If computers are available, students can search the American Life Histories collection and identify narratives that interest them. The teacher can set the parameters: geographical choices, childhood experiences, occupations (miners, ranchers, factory workers, etc.), pioneer stories, etc. If Internet access is not dependable or readily available, the teacher can select and print life histories to distribute to students.

    - Once students have a narrative to work with, they can read and comment briefly on the life history to

show comprehension of the basic points of the story.

Note - At this point, some students will be quite comfortable with composing "original," yet "found" poetry, while others will need help to get started. The teacher may suggest that the student focus on one aspect of the narrative or on several poetic elements. Setting basic requirements will provide a basis for grading, if necessary.

5. Presentation of results. When the students and the teacher are satisfied with the poetry, it can be published in a class booklet and/or presented in an oral reading. A student presenter could, for instance, present himself as the person in the narrative from the American Life Histories collection and tell his/her story in verse.

Evaluation and Extension

The American Life Histories component of the poetry unit requires students to compose poetry according to specified guidelines, incorporating selected poetic elements. Writing can be published in book form and on-line, and presented orally at a reading.

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Enhancing a Poetry Unit with American Memory

Alison Westfall and Laura Mitchell

Found Poetry Based on Elsie Wall

from American Life Histories, 1936-1940

Rocks in her chair between supper and dinner,
thirty-two but looks forty-five.
Never learned how to chop in the garden,
never learned right how to pay at the store.

Rocks in her chair between supper and dinner,
children in rags lined up on the porch:
all she can count, all she can figure.
How can she clothe them to send them to school?

Daughters with bright eyes of Jean Harlow,
hang Jesus and movie stars framed on the walls.
Six dollars a week for six mouths in the family:
How will they work, get out of this town?

Jim works in the cotton mill, tends crops in the garden.

Elsie can cook if there's food in the house.
Pots catch the flow from the rainy roof leaks.
Rocks on her porch in rain or in fine.

Top of Page

American Life Histories: Manuscripts from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936-1940

[Cowboy Life]

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Warren, Ivey G. PW

District 17. Words 1753

Lubbock County

Lubbock, Texas

240

pg. 1 COWBOY LIFE IN LONE CATTLE CAMPS

"I have spent most of my life on ranches," said Mart (M. F.) Driver, who is 70 years old and who is a veteran cowboy of Oklahoma and Texas cattle ranches.

"I came to Lubbock on October 1, 1906 from Oklahoma and started in to run a freight wagon between Lubbock and Big Spring. The weather was dreadfully bad that fall. We had one snow that measured 14 inches on a level. At that time the roads were so bad that, although I was driving six mules to my wagon, it took me over a month to cover my usual route, which generally required about 15 days."

"In 1909 I gave [up?] freighting and turned cowboy again." Mr. Driver continued. "I never was satisfied [unless?] I was out on a ranch looking after cows. So I got a job with R. M. Clayton and W. D. Johnson on the Muleshoe Ranch down close to Post, in Garsa County. This ranch was known in earlier days as "The Old Curry-Comb Ranch." After C. W. Post bought up this land he leased 200 sections of it to Clayton and Johnson for ranching purposes and they stocked it with nearly 9,000 head of cattle. This ranch was operated under the names of "Muleshoe," and the cattle were branded with a muleshoe.

"The Muleshoe Ranch headquarters were located 4 miles north of Post, but I stayed at a little one room house on the Plains. Out on the range, I believe it would be more correct if I said in the pastures, for the ranches were nearly all [fenced?] at this late a date, I was busy with the cattle and when I went to the house I was chief cook, bottle and dish washer. I lived alone and did all of my own work."

"I had company one night when I was not expecting to, an uninvited guest came in [onetime?] during the day and took possession of my bed," Mr. Driver said. "It was late and I was tired when I got home that night. I just hurried through my supper and went right to bed. I noticed a knot in the bed as soon as I lay down. I had been working pretty hard for several days and had been hurriedly spreading my bed up in the mornings, so I supposed that my blanket had become rumpled. *{Begin handwritten}* [C12-???] *{End handwritten}*

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I turned over and stretched out on the other side of the bed. About the time I was beginning to feel pretty comfortable and dosing a little. I become conscious of slight movement somewhere in the bed. I was wide awake in a minute at that, and I lay there wondering what it could have been and waiting for some more moving, but nothing happened. I told myself that I had been mistaken and I tried to get to sleep again, but in vain. Finally I turned back over and felt for the knot, but it was gone. A little farther over I found a roll that seemed to extend in all directions across the bed, everywhere I put my hand I touched it, and it wriggled and wriggled. I threw the covers back leaped from the bed and grabbed my old oil lantern from the table, as soon as I could get a light. I went back and examined the bed. When I turned the blanket back I found a big bull snake squirming around on the mattress. The house did not have any screens and the floor was full of holes so was easy for snakes to got it. The mice were very bad there and snakes [are?] usually attracted to mice infected places. They are said to be a great [help?] in exterminating rodents, but I did not mind the mice as much as I did the snakes, however that was the only time I ever went to bed with a snake.

"I left the Muleshoe Ranch and went to work for Ellwood on the Spade [Rnahc?] in 1914. *{Begin deleted text}* [The?] *{End deleted text}* Spade Ranch headquarters were over in Lamb County, just 6 miles north of Anton, Hackley County. This ranch had an area of about 468 square miles *{Begin deleted text}* [???] *{End deleted text}* *{Begin deleted text}* [?????] *{End deleted text}* being 9 miles wide and 52 miles long. Nothing but White Faced Faced Hereford cattle were kept on the Spade Ranch, and steer cattle was generally all that was kept on this ranch, but 1,000 cows, a large number of which were milk cows, were shipped from the dry pastures of the Ellwood Ranch near Colorado City, in the late fall of 1917, and pastured on the Spade Ranch that winter. The cattle [?] brand was a spade. There was usually about 20,000 cattle on the ranch, but at one time taxes were paid on 35,000 head of live stock on the Spade Ranch, this list also included the saddle horses."

"I worked on the Spade Ranch 14 years." Mr. Driver continued. "Sometimes I was

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"Some men do not like to batch, they complain of getting lonesome, but I never was that way. I never cared for any kind of games, or dances. I never cared for a lot of company. I liked the camp life, liked being alone with just a big herd of cattle, I lived my myself in a little house for [?] years, while I worked on this ranch. It sure seemed like home to me.

"There was one time though when I was mighty glad to have some of the other boys come along," Mr. Driver sated. "That was just after that big blizzard in 1918. I was in camp by my self looking after the cattle that had been shipped from Colorado City. When that blizzard struck, I had 26 calves, with this bunch of cows, to *{Begin deleted text}* [a?] *{End deleted text}* take care of. The calves ranged from 2 weeks down to 3 days old, the poor little things just looked as if they would freeze when the wind first hit them. I hitched up to the wagon and drove down in the pasture, everytime I saw a calf I turned my team in among [?] cattle until I was close enough to lasso the calf, then I pulled it up in the wagon. I got all of them and hauled them to the house where I could give then better care and they were protected from the cold there. I went to feeding them on alfalfa hay, cotton seed meal and bran. I raised all of these calves but one, and they never had another drop of milk [adter?] I hauled them home that day. It did not take them long to learn to eat and they got along fine by themselves.

"About the time I got the calves all up I began to suffer with my head and face. My jaws went to aching until I could hardly stand it when I went out in the wind, but I had to see about the cows. Some of them were going lame and getting down in the pastures with their feet and legs frozen. I kept going out and doing what I could, but I know that I could [not?] keep it up much longer and I hoped that some of the other boys would come to my camp. None of them showed up [howeber] and after about four or five days I got a chanch to send in word that I needed help, [?] by a passer-by and the next day assistance arrived. Tom Arnett came and brought me back to town. My face was swollen

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"I come to town and bought me a home and got married," Mr. Driver said with a twinkle in his eyes. "I go out every fall and work for Len McClellan on the Circle Bar Ranch for a month or two during the round up. I cook and run the [chuck?] wagon, while the boys brand the new calves, and get things in shape around the ranch for the winter."

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AMERICAN MEMORY | PREVIOUS | NEXT | NEW SEARCH

American Life Histories: Manuscripts from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936-1940

[Anna Potter Davis]

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Marie Carter

Anthony, N.M.

1400 words

OLD TIMERS STORIES

Mrs. Anna Potter Davis (Husband; Charles F. Davis)

Interview: July 13, 1937

Mrs. Charles F. Davis, the wife of one of Anthony's most successful business men, told me in a confidential manner:

" Sometimes I close my eyes and visualize the Mesilla Valley as it looked when I moved here with my parents from Weir, Kansas in 1898, but when I open my eyes the vision has vanished. Perhaps it is just as well for at that time there wasn't much to boast about."

" The day our family arrived in Anthony R. C. Bailey met us at the station. There were only a few houses and they were so far apart that my brother, Volney, wanted to know where the town was.

" The Rio Grande was very wide and very high and so strong and swift that the sticks we tossed into it were carried down stream in a twinkling.

" When R. C. Bailey, son of old doctor Bailey, told us that he was going to ferry us across the river, we, meaning us kids, thought he meant fairy. I was just dying to ask him about it, but in those days children were trained not to quiz grown up folks. So I held my peace--at least for the time being. Anyway we were at the peak of thrill-dom when he helped us into his new skiff. *{Begin handwritten}* [C. 18 - 17 ?] *{End handwritten}*

" Poor Volney I could see by the way he clutched the sides of the boat he was more scared than us girls. Finally we got out of the boat and

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got into a buggy and were driven to Chamberino by a Mexican with a large sombrero that tickled us to giggles. At Chamberino we lived in a large red brick house, built by the [Morleys?], a well to do family from the east. It was the most modern house in the valley.

" Father found farming to be a bigger job than he expected it to be. For he had been a mining man for years and knew very little about agriculture. The first year he worked hard but ran short of making a living to the extent of eight hundred dollars.

" In the old days land was cheap anywhere from three to ten dollars an acre, but it tooks lots of time and hard work to clear it as most of the valley was bosque or woodland. We used to attend the Methodist church at Berino, the only church, with the exception of the Catholic church, between El Paso and Las Cruces.

" One of our chief amusements at the church gatherings were candy pulls. The boys never failed to come because they delighted to stick the warm taffy into the girls' long hair. And the only way to remove the candy was to cut off some of the hair.

" The first school I attended was a one room affair at Chamberino. Miss Helen Morley was the teacher and she taught several grades in one room. The floor was packed dirt and the benches were crude hard seats without a back rest of any kind. We used slates and pencils, too. There was a big tin pail of water with a tin dipper floating in it. The pail set on a box in a corner and when it was empty one of the larger boys took it out to the hand pump and refilled it.

We had lots of picnics, dances, barbecues and horseback riding in the old days. We didn't have a variety of diversions like the young folks have

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to-day, but I am quite sure we enjoyed ourselves just as much. We didn't know very much about such things as dates, for the young men called at the homes of the eligible young ladies. Taking long rides with a young man without a chaperon just wasn't done. Hay rides well chaperoned were included in our amusements, too. Sometimes it took several wagons piled high with hay to accomodate the crowd. Each wagon had two or three older women for chaperons.

We had lots of fun jogging along in the moonlight with our legs swinging over the sides of the wagon with everybody singing the popular songs of the day; some in tune but most of them out of tune. As a rule the largest and invariably the fattest boy in the party would have a high squeaky tenor, and some little scrawny fellow would have a deep baritone or bass. The boys would always bring their guitars, mandolins, harmonicas and banjos along. There is one thing I was always ashamed of; it was the stolen watermelons. But boys will be boys.

" We were always permitted to go with the boy we liked best and sit next to him on a hay ride, but the nearest we ever got to making love or necking as they do now was when some boy, under cover of hay, squeezed a girl's hand. Some of the bolder ones did steal an occasional hug or a kiss but only when the chaperon had gone star gazing. This rarely ever happened, however, for the old time chaperon made it her special duty to watch her charges with an augus eye.

" Girls used to take a great deal of pleasure in showing off their cooking to their boy friend, especially their homemade candies, and cakes. Many a boy and prospective husband was entertained in the kitchen while mother and dad and the rest of the family occupied themselves in the parlor. On winter evenings the boy usually helped to pull the candy, and whip the eggs for a cake. And when we made ice cream they always chopped the ice

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and turned the handle of the ice cream freezer.

" The old-fashioned Sunday dinner was wonderful. Sometimes two or three families would drive in on Sunday and remain for dinner. There would be several vehicles outside the house. If that happened now days the neighbors would think there was going to be a funeral and want to know who had died.

" We were always prepared for company on Sunday, for all of the bread, pies, cakes doughnuts and cookies were baked on Saturday. And if we were going to have a Virgina baked ham that was usually baked the day before, too. we had a long table and on Sunday every seat was occupied. Sometimes we would have baked chicken with dressing and gravy.

We raised our own vegetables and when dinner was served we had a variety of summer squash, mashed potatoes, yellow snap beans, green Kentucky wonders, lettuce with homemade French dressing, Indian relish, fresh tomatoes, sliced cucumbers and candied sweet potatoes. we always had two kinds of pie, white layer cake, yellow loaf cake, cookies and doughnuts. Our country butter, eggs, milk and cream were always fresh.

" After dinner the men would go out on the porch to smoke, the children would go outside to play and the women would clear the table, and enjoy a good gossip while they washed and dried the dishes. When we left Chamberino we went to La Mesa to live--in the same house my brother Volney Potter occupies at the present time. My father, Darwin Potter, was a brother to Pearl Bailey's mother, and Pearl Bailey is a son of Dr. Bailey who used to practice at Chamberino.

" I have lived in the valley since I was ten years old, consequently I have seen many changes. Some people think that the building of the Elephant Butte dam was the greatest event in the history of the Mesilla Valley. But

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there is something that meant a great deal more to me," Mrs. Davis said. "It was the time they built a bridge strong enough to resist the Rio Grande and to really stay put[.?]"

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Mrs. Anna Potter Davis was born at [Weir?] Kansas; June 7, 1886. Her father was Darwin Potter and her mother was Annetta Cochran Potter. She attended school at Chamberino and continued her education in the public shools of Dona Ana County, and then attended the New Mexico State College at Mesilla Park, New Mexico. She is the wife of Charles Fields Davis, prominent business man of Anthony, New Mexico. Mr. Davis is the owner and manager of the Valley Implement Company of Anthony.

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AMERICAN MEMORY | PREVIOUS | NEXT | NEW SEARCH

American Life Histories: Manuscripts from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936-1940

[The Newton Family]

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FEDERAL WRITERS' PROJECT

Miami, Florida

Mabel B. Francis

Editor

1,925 Words

8 Pages

John Newton Blair's family

Rural Route #1

[Pembrook?] Road

North Miami, Florida

December 14, 1938

Walter A. DeLamater

THE NEWTON FAMILY

Situated on a little farm near Miami, Florida is the small cottage that is the home of Jack and Margaret Newton and their three small children, Joanne, eight years old, Betty five, and Jack junior, two.

The farm consists of about seven and a half acres of land, half of which is fairly productive muck, suitable for the growing of vegetables. Black-eyed peas, tomatoes, corn, squash and okra are the chief crops with a sprinkling of small patches of radishes, carrots, onions and other necessities for the family table. The balance of the land, which is mostly a sandy loam, is used for a few citrus trees, papaya plants and for the house, barn and pasturage.

The house to a four room frame bungalow, well built, but badly in need of repairs. The roof leaks in one or two places and a few of the side boards we somewhat warped. Inside the house, which I found to be kept neat and clean and the floor freshly scrubbed, are two bedrooms, a dining room and a small kitchen.

The furniture to a collection of odd pieces gathered here and

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there, a few of which are home-made from packing boxes and orange crates. There were a few scattered rugs on the floors and clean muslin curtains at the windows.

There is no electricity or running water, but upon sampling the pump water, I found it to be of excellent taste. They do have, however, a modern gasoline operated washing machine to do the family washing and a three burner kerosene stove to cook on.

The livestock consists of to cows, named "Bobbed-Tail" and "Goldie," about sixty-five chickens, twelve ducks, two white rabbits, two dogs of undetermined origin, and three cats, besides Joanne's two pet gophers which she keeps in a little pen so they cannot run away.

Joanne, the oldest, is a bright, blue-eyed little girl with golden brown hair. She is fond of all the animals and has even found names for most of the chickens. How she tells them apart so easily in a mystery to everyone.

She has set out a dented garbage can cover on an old tree stump. This she always keeps full fresh, clean water and it makes quite a practical bird bath, much used by the birds. Joanne is especially fond of a small covy of quail which can be constantly heard calling about the place. They have become so tame that they will approach within fifteen feet of the house in search of food. Under no circumstances, will she allow anyone to shoot them,

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in season or out.

Joanne attends school during the winter and seems to be getting along very well. She likes to meet other children with whom she has lots of fun when not too busy with her animals. She is proud of being "such a big girl" and spends much of her time in looking after and trying to mother her little brother and sister.

Betty, the next eldest, looks somewhat like Joanne but is very different in disposition. She is quiet and retiring and I was unable to get any response from her. She would just look at me and smile when I tried to talk to her, then ran off somewhere out of sight. Her mother said that she is always very bashful with strangers.

Little Jack, who is very mischievous, is just old enough to get into everything and every body's way. His special delight is to knock over Joanne's bird bath and then run as fast as he can to hide behind his mother's skirts. This is Joanne's chief worry in life and she has begged her Daddy to build a small fence around her bird bath. He smiles at her anxiety but he has promised to do as she asks at the first opportunity.

The morning that I visited the Newton farm, I found them all at home, except Jack. It was a rather chilly morning and Margaret, the mother, did not think that Joanne should go to school because of a slight cold. She thought the warm sunshine would be the best

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remedy for the child's cold.

Margaret was getting everything ready to do the family washing and as I drove up she greeted me with her usual pleasant smile. I have known the family casually for some time. When I told her my mission, and asked her if she would cooperate with me in giving me a few details of her life, she smiled brightly and said., I've never thought much about the things I do in life. I guess I keep too busy, but I will be only too glad to give you any information that I can. I have always taken everything as it came along and just figured that we live about the same as other folks do around."

As she stood there by the washing machine, Margaret made a pleasing picture. She is a small, well built woman

about 35 years of age, rather pretty. Her dark complexion, blue eyes and brownish colored hair are an unusual combination. She was dressed in a nest green cotton house dress but was bare footed. She told me later that the only time she wore shoes was when she knew that company was coming or on her weekly trips to town. She does not like to wear them then, she said, but must do so for convention sake. None of the children wore shoes except Joanne who only wore them when she went to school.

When asked how she occupied her time, Margaret said:

"Jack gets up at five o'clock every morning and feeds the chickens, ducks and other animals, then he milks the cows. I get

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up at six o'clock to cook his breakfast and fix his lunch. By 6:30 Jack has finished with his chores and we eat breakfast, which usually consists of grits, eggs, biscuits and coffee. Sundays, we have pancakes and syrup or honey.

"By seven o'clock, Jack is ready to go to work. He works in a lumber yard about six miles from here and goes back and forth in a 1928 Ford sedan, -- the same car that we came to Florida in, "she added. "After Jack leaves it is time to get the children dressed and feed and get Joanne off to school. Joanne takes a school bus that picks the children up along the way.

"Then I either wash my clothes or go to work in the garden, chopping a few weeds and picking some vegetables. I work this way every day until 12:30, when I must stop and fix some lunch for myself and the children. After lunch and in the heat of the day I just cannot work in the open so I tidy up my house and, if I have a little time to spare, I lie down for a little while and make the children do the same. At three o'clock I'm at the garden again for about an hour and then I must stop to feed the chickens and milk the cows. By that time, it is about five o'clock and Jack has come home from work so I must start preparing supper.

"After Jack gets home he works in the garden, picking and hoeing until dark, then we have our supper. You see we cannot waste any daylight hours. Jack also works all day Sunday in the field.

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This goes on without much change from day to day except that on Saturday night we bundle the children into the car and we all go into town to do our weekly shopping, after which we see a movie."

"We do not have very much in the way of ready cash, "continued Margaret, "but I suppose we are a lot better off than lots of folks. We are all healthy and happy together so I guess we have just as nice a living as anyone. Although Jack only makes $12.00 a week at the lumber company, we have managed to keep ourselves well and always have plenty of good substantial food to eat. Whatever we have left over in vegetables, we trade or sell to the neighbors or to the local store for something we need. We try to manage our farm so that we always have some kind of fresh vegetables at all times of the year. I preserve some and we always store up a supply of field corn to feed the cows and chickens when the grass is not so good.

"We hope to get us a few hogs next year so we can have our own fresh pork. About once a week, Jack will shoot a couple of rabbits and, of course, we have our chickens. We only eat the roosters and save all the hens for laying. Some day we hope to have a nice chicken farm here, but we will have to wait for awhile as we must do some repairs on the house. Jack hopes to start on that this coming Sunday. If we just had more time, we could do lots more but we can't afford to hire anybody and, of course, the children are too young to help."

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"We have been here ten years now and we own this farm, and do not owe anyone a penny. We came here form a little town in Illinois and have always been farm folks. This is the only place we have lived in Florida. Jack had a little saved up when we first got married and he owned his own farm. He sold his place and we decided to try out luck here. Since being here, we think that there is no other place in the world like it and we are contented and happy here. Of course, like everyone, we have our dreams and ambitions. We want to have running water, electricity and a new and bigger house and each week, regardless of what we would like to spend, we put a little something away toward it. It isn't much, but we are still young and strong and feel that someday we will have what we want. As it is, we have good land and good health, plenty of good wholesome food, a roof over our heads, and good children so I guess the Lord has not been so hard on us and we are thankful for all we have."

When I first asked Margaret about her political affiliations she did not seem inclined to reply but later she said that they were Republicans. However, for all purposes of registration and for anyone's general knowledge they are Democrats since they came South. Nevertheless, she thinks that the present administration has done a lot for the poor folks.

"Yes, I believe in religion and formerly belonged to the Baptist church but it seems like now that we never have time to go to

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church. I try to teach the children the fundamentals of our religion though, and maybe some day we'll get caught up with everything so we can begin going to church again."

"We are trying our best to have a good home for our children and want them all to have a good education and go to school and maybe, to college. Jack managed to graduate from high school but I was only able to finish grammar school. My folks were ailing and I was badly needed at home to help with the work, but I want my children to have a better chance."

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American Life Histories: Manuscripts from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936-1940

[Blizzard of 1888]

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O.W. Meier Relates Experience He Had in the Blizzard of 1888.

"The awful blizzard of Jan 12, 1888," said O. W. Meier, cannot be forgotten by anyone who experienced it as I did." He and his brothers were attending school in District 71, 15 miles [wouthwest?] of Lincoln, and this is his story of that blizzard which swept over the country 50 years ago.

"The weather had been mild, after a heavy fall of snow. Deep snow lay over all the ground in fields and on the roads. Long hanging icecicles dripped melting snow water from the eaves of the house and barn. The sky was dark and heavy. Beautiful big white flakes were falling fast that morning of the fateful day. Father and mother said, "The girls must stay at home, but the boys may go to school."

"At half past eight Walter, then 8, Henry 12, and I, 15 years of age, started out thru the deep white snow. Pretty starry flakes made us look like snow men before we reached the school, a mile and a half from home. When we got there we found other boys, and some girls, playing "fox and geese". Henry and I jointed in the game.

"The bell rang, calling us in to study and recite. The heavy snow kept falling all that day. By the middle of the afternoon, at the last recess, the snow was about two feet deep, and on the top it was almost as light as feathers. At a quarter to three, the school bell rang for the last time that day. We rushed for the brooms to sweep the wet snow from our boots. Just when we got settled down to our books as swiftly as lightning, the storm struck the north side of the house. The whole building shivered and quaked. With deafening whack the shutters were slammed shut by the terrific wind. In an instant the room became black as night, then for a moment there came a ray of light, I stood and said, "May my brothers and I go home?" The teacher said. "Those boys who live south may put on their coats and go, but the rest of you must stay here in this house."

"The two Strelow boys, Robert and George, with John Conrad, my two brothers, and I, put out into the storm for our homes. We had not gone a rod when we found ourselves in a heap, in a heavy drift of snow. We took hold of each others' hands, pulled ourselves out, got into the road, and the cold north wind blew us down the road a half mile south, where the Strelow boys and John Conrad had to go west a mile or more. When they reached a bridge in a ravine, the little fellows sheltered a while under the bridge, a wooden culvert, but Robert, the oldest, insisted that they push on thru the blinding storm for their homes. In the darkness they stumbled in, and by degrees their parents thawed them out, bathed their frozen hands, noses, ears and cheeks, while the boys cried in pain.

"My brothers and I could not walk thru the deep snow in the road, so we took down the rows of corn stalks to keep from losing ourselves "till we reached our pasture fence. Walter was too short to wade the deep snow in the field, so Henry and I dragged him over the top. For nearly a mile we followed the fence "till we reached the corral and pens. In the howling storm, we could hear the pigs squeal as they were freezing in the mud and snow. Sister Ida had opened the gate and let the cows in from the field to the sheds, just as the cold wind struck and froze her skirts stiff around her like hoops. The barn and stables were drifted over when we reached there. The roaring wind and stiffling snow blinded us so that we had to feel thru the yard to the door of our house. *{Begin handwritten}* C15 - 2/27/41 - Nebraska *{End handwritten}*

"The lamp was lighted. Mother was walking the floor, wringing her hands and calling for her boys. Pa was shaking the ice and snow from his coat and boots. He had gone out to meet us but was forced back by the storm. We stayed in the house all that night. It was so cold that many people froze

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to death in the snow, and the loss in livestock was big. The next morning we walked out upon the hard deep drifts shoveled a way thru to the barn where we gound our cows and horses alive on top of the snow that had drifted into their stalls, but a lot of our hogs were frozen stiff in mud, ice and snow. The road we came over on our way home was strewn with frozen quails rabbits, dead.

"That was an awful night on the open plains. Many teachers and school children lost their lives in that blinding storm, while trying to find their way home. The blizzard of 1888 has not been forgotten."

Information about SGML version of this document.

Enhancing a Poetry Unit with American Memory

Alison Westfall and Laura Mitchell

Found Poetry Examples based on the "Blizzard of 1888"

For a moment
The room became as black as night

Then
For an instant
There came a ray of light
We all walked out
Into the storm
Be brave
Feel scared
Don't give up
Cold
North wind
Blew us half a mile south
We let our friends go
And continued
Alone
Animals
People
Lost
To the storm
All while trying to find
Their way
Home

Long hanging icicles dripped,
Melted snow,
Beautiful,
Big,
White flakes,
Pretty starry flakes,
as light as feathers.

Falling fast,
Deep white snow,
Snow covers people like snowmen.

Roaring,
Stifling,
Snow.

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